

AccessLetter

**Cambridge Commission for
Persons with Disabilities**

Cambridge Wins Accessible America Award

The National Organization on Disability (N.O.D.) has selected the City of Cambridge as the grand prizewinner in its 2005 Accessible America Contest. The \$25,000 cash award recognizes Cambridge as a national model for its focus on disability issues and for its successful design and implementation of programs, services and facilities that are accessible to people with disabilities.

“This award truly belongs to every citizen of Cambridge,” said David Peterson, former member of the Commission for Persons with Disabilities. “The award didn’t happen by chance—it is the result of many factors, the common thread in which is the commitment, dedication, and involvement of the citizens of Cambridge, both individually and collectively.”

The Accessible America Competition recognizes towns and cities that demonstrate exceptional commitment to offering people with disabilities full and equal opportunities to participate in the life of their community, including access to jobs, education, religious worship, voting, transportation, housing, and emergency preparedness planning.

Cambridge was recognized for its promotion of accessibility through its annual capital funding process that provides for the removal of barriers in public buildings, its Façade Improvement Program which requires businesses that receive matching funds from the City to make their entrances accessible, and for its commitment to review open space projects and



**Façade Improvement Projects
have resulted in greater
accessibility**

fund improvements. Over two dozen parks and playgrounds have been made more accessible.

Cambridge was also noted for the seven wheelchair accessible taxis the City has had for over ten years and its new centralized dispatching service, Accessible Cambridge Taxi, that has improved the availability of these taxicabs. To make the taxi services more affordable to disabled and senior residents, the City funds a taxi discount-coupon program, and has raised the value of the coupons as taxi fares have increased.

In respect to promoting participation in services and programs, the City was recognized for its adoption of an

Inclusion Policy for Out of School Time Programs and for the Department of Human Service Programs hiring of an Inclusion Specialist to provide staff in Community Schools, Childcare and Family Support programs, Recreation, and Youth Centers with on-site coaching and help in developing or adapting existing activities to include children with disabilities.

The award highlighted the very important role played by the City’s Commission for Person with Disabilities staff and eleven member volunteer board in promoting accessibility. These people, most of whom have some physical, mental or sensory disability or live with a relative who does, work tirelessly to help the City communicate a welcoming attitude. Commission staff and board members also sit the City’s Open Space Committee, the Special Events Planning Committee, and Fair Housing Committee,

and the Local Emergency Planning Committee to ensure that the issues of our disabled residents and visitors are addressed. They work with faith communities and businesses to help make their buildings and services accessible. The Commission maintains communication to the disability community through a bi-monthly newsletter and website, and works to ensure that other publications about living and working in Cambridge include information about access and services for people with disabilities.

The City of Cambridge will be formally recognized on June 12 in a ceremony at Cambridge City Hall when Mayor Kenneth Reeves and City officials receive the grand prize from representatives of N.O.D. and United Parcel Service (UPS), which is funding the \$25,000 award. The prize money is intended to fund local disability-related efforts.

The Accessible America Contest is administered by N.O.D.'s Community Partnership Program and sponsored by generous grants from UPS and Wal-Mart. Second and third place awards of \$20,000 and \$10,000 funded by Wal-Mart went to West Hollywood, CA and Austin, TX respectfully. To find out about entering the Accessible America Competition, contact Ms. Sharone Belt 202-293-5960. The deadline for this year is October 31, 2006. For more information about the National Organization on Disability, visit their website at <www.nod.org>.

My Body Politic: A Memoir

(by Simi Linton; University of Michigan Press, 2006)

"Everything I learned about dancing," writes Simi Linton in her wonderful new book, "I learned from a quadriplegic."

Those of us who have had the pleasure to know people with disabilities may not be surprised by this statement, but to the uninitiated public, dancing in a wheelchair will

be just one of many revelations in store for them. People within and without the disability world will find enormous pleasure as well as information in this thoughtful, well-written autobiography of an education and career in the disability rights movement.

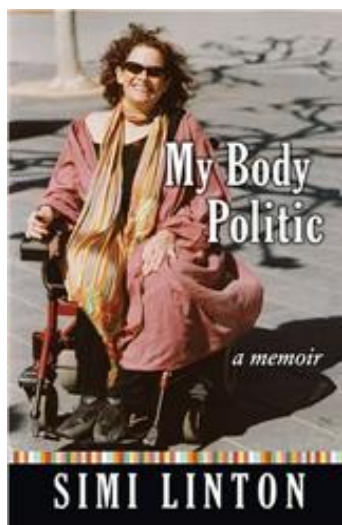
Simi Linton had few occasions to think about disability before an automobile accident at the age of 23. As she adjusted to her new wheels, she found that there were two types of people: the professionals, and the disabled. The former had a patronizing, hopeless attitude toward the latter, who reacted, understandably, by hating their guts. Although at first, Linton was determined to become a psychologist herself and cross the line, as the years passed, she discovered that life could be just as fulfilling when you had a disability, and that you could be a professional, working woman who happened to use a wheelchair.

In the 1970's, very little information was available for people with disabilities about the subject of sexuality. Working with her friend Glenn, she created a project that would turn into the National Coalition on Sexuality and Disability. This Coalition challenged traditional medicine by saying that sex is a right, and that the definition of it should be expanded and information about it distributed freely to people with disabilities.

People with disabilities can be just as sexy as anyone else, Linton affirms, yet her language never becomes the least bit uncomfortable. She clearly takes joy in exploring new ways to do and think about things such as sexuality, and loves to rattle people's notions about sex, as is evidenced by one of many laugh-out-loud funny quotes in the book,

'A.... guest said, upon meeting me: "Now I hear you're in the sex business with Glenn. Is it true?" "Well, yes," I told him, "but he is much more highly paid than I.'"

A hippie in the 60's who protested against the Vietnam war, Linton



became educated in the disability world just as that world was changing rapidly, with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and then, seventeen years later, the ADA. Though at first she was reluctant to identify herself with the group, she gradually found herself drawn more and more into disability culture. Her discourse on a wide variety of topics, from traveling in Cuba to riding New York buses, are enlightening both for the sheer diversity of her experiences -- Do you remember the Not Dead Yet rallies? She does! -- and for the simple way in which she outlines the problems that people with disabilities face in the world everyday.

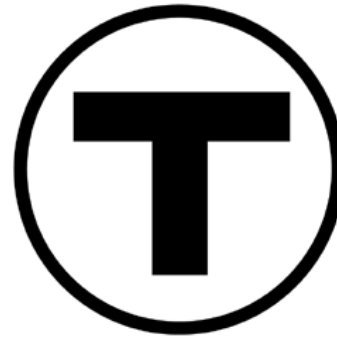
Linton was one of the pioneers of the Society for Disability Studies (SDS), and helped to create one of the most cherished traditions of the organization: that of the yearly dance at their convention. A free spirit to the utmost, Linton's descriptions of how people of all abilities come together to dance in the disability community will surely make you want to wriggle your body to the music yourself. 'He wraps his legs around the back of her wheelchair and she takes him for a spin around the dance floor.....Our wheelchairs bounded across the floor, our crutches twirled in space, like kinetic sculpture set to music.'

Linton explains that by the simple act of dancing, people with disabilities throw all assumptions into the air. They create new art and challenge the definition of old. People are often ashamed of their bodies, old bodies, wrinkled bodies, - they are afraid to show exuberance or look a little 'weird'. Don't be afraid, Simi Linton urges. Throw your head back, hear the music, and dance in whatever way you can - with your wheels, your tongue, your voice, anything.

Linton is neither a hero figure nor an object of pity. She is a person whose story is long and fascinating, and who has written her own life down just as it is so that others can share it. Her successes and her sorrows, along with the amazing friends she meets and mourns along the way, will make this a book you will never forget. For the disability community, she offers honesty, insight and a very important question: When was the last time that you went dancing?

Book Review by Kate Ryan

MBTA Pledges \$310 Million To Improve Access



Organizations representing people with disabilities announced in March they had reached a settlement in a class action lawsuit against the Massachusetts Bay Transportation

Authority (MBTA) that will result in \$310 million in accessibility improvements to the transit system. The lawsuit was brought over accessibility problems that denied people with disabilities equal access to the public transportation system.

Under the agreement, the MBTA will undertake major improvements in equipment, facilities and services that promise to enhance accessibility for people with disabilities while improving service for all MBTA passengers. Among the improvements described in the settlement, the MBTA will construct new elevators at the Harvard, Central, and Porter Square red line stations.

Both sides in the dispute hailed the settlement as the beginning of a new relationship between the MBTA and people with disabilities. "This settlement means I will finally have the freedom to come and go, where I want and when I want," said Rob Park, a wheelchair user who commutes to work on the subway and has found himself stranded by broken elevators. "I'm looking forward to new buses, new trains and elevators that actually work. I look forward to the day when everyone truly has equal access to the T."

Filed in 2002 by Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) under the Americans with Disabilities Act and representing eleven individual plaintiffs and the Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL), the lawsuit cited a number of problems that make it difficult for people who are blind, deaf or have mobility disabilities from using MBTA subways and

buses. The complaint alleged that the MBTA had failed to maintain bus lifts, station elevators and other accessibility equipment in good operating condition, maintain subway stations and subway train platforms in safe and accessible condition, and ensure that bus and train operators provided proper service to passengers with disabilities.

GBLS presented MBTA management with extensive research on the problems, including undercover monitoring of buses, filming of Green Line trains, computer analyses of elevator maintenance records, and elevator inspections by outside experts. MBTA General Manager Dan Grabauskas directed MBTA lawyers to work with the plaintiffs to reach an agreement. Negotiations began last July and concluded in March of this year. A public hearing on the settlement will be held June 15 before U.S. District Judge Morris E. Lasker.

Under the settlement, no damages will be paid to individual plaintiffs. Instead, funds will be used to improve T services and infrastructure. Under key terms of the settlement, the MBTA has agreed to:

- **Improve bus services** by requiring bus drivers to treat passengers who have disabilities with courtesy, use lifts and ramps properly, pull to the curb at stops, make stop announcements, and follow all rules concerning accessible services.
- **Improve bus maintenance** to ensure that ramps and other devices work properly.
- **Buy nearly 400 new low-floor buses**, which provide for the easiest boarding.
- **Invest \$122 million in elevators and escalators** over the next five years to ensure continuous elevator service during all passenger service hours.
- **Close platform gaps** between subway cars and platforms, which present serious safety hazards, especially to passengers using wheelchairs.



- **Replace mobile wheelchairs lifts** that are the most dangerous and difficult to use with “mini-high” platforms and ramps, and speed up the introduction of low-floor trains on all branches of the Green Line.
- **Install new PA systems** and electronic message boards to provide all passengers with reliable, up-to-date information.
- **Improve training and customer assistance** involving people with disabilities.
- **Appoint an assistant general manager** with responsibility for making bus and subway services accessible.
- **Monitor compliance** through a court-appointed monitor and continued undercover monitoring of bus services.

“These changes will make the T more accessible for people with disabilities and improve service for all of our customers,” said Grabauskas. “These improvements will mean fewer delays and a better experience for all T passengers. This agreement will help make the MBTA a model for the country in ensuring equal access to public transportation for people with disabilities.”

Plaintiffs hailed the settlement as the beginning of a new era of independence for people with disabilities who rely on public transportation. They also noted that continued cooperation between the two sides – as well as the support of the public – will be necessary to enact the changes envisioned in the settlement.

“We see this settlement as the start of a new relationship between everyone who works for the T and those people with disabilities who depend on it,” said Bill Henning, Executive Director of the Boston Center for Independent Living. Henning cited three

immediate priorities for implementing the agreement: improving the knowledge of T staff about the needs of disabled passengers, fixing broken elevators, and informing the general public about barriers facing people with disabilities on the T and the efforts being made to address them.

The lead attorney for the plaintiffs said the process of reaching the settlement has already changed attitudes at the T.

“We have a lot of work ahead of us, but one thing has changed already,” said Dan Manning, an attorney with Greater Boston Legal Services. “Before this case, people with disabilities were virtually invisible at the T. Now, they have a voice.”

Plaintiffs named in the class action heralded the settlement as ushering in a new era of accessibility.

They hoped the agreement would encourage more people with disabilities to use public transportation.

“To me, this settlement is an opportunity to have more reasonable access to public transportation,” said Joanne Daniels-Finegold, the lead named plaintiff. “Many people with disabilities stay home rather than struggle with the T. I hope this agreement encourages more of them to exercise their right to equal access.”

The Boston Center for Independent Living provides services, community education, advocacy and employment for individuals with disabilities <www.bostoncil.org>. Greater Boston Legal Services provides free legal services to low-income people and nonprofit organizations <www.gbls.org>.

Upcoming Events of Interest to the Disability Community

- May 3** **RSI (repetitive strain injury) Monthly Drop-in Support & Information Meeting** (no registration is necessary) on first Wednesday of each month, 6 to 8 pm at 650 Beacon Street in Boston, 4th floor Conference Room, just steps from the MBTA station in Kenmore Square. Be sure to arrive before 7 pm when the lobby door is locked. RSI Action volunteers will answer questions and provide resources and support, including the opportunity to view our provider evaluation book. For more information, call 617-247-6827, check web at <www.rsiaction.org> or email <cnot@rsiaction.org>.
- May 3** **Manic Depression & Depressive Association (MDDA) Bipolar Support Group** meets every Wednesday evening, 7 to 9 pm at McLean Hospital in Belmont (Demarneffe Building, 1st floor lobby). Includes a lecture, 7-8 pm, on the second and fourth Wednesdays. Call 617-855-3665 for more information.
- May 4** **Evening of Remembrance**, the annual Cambridge Holocaust Commemoration program will be at Temple Beth Shalom, 8 Tremont Street in Cambridge from 7 - 8:30 p.m. All are invited for an, candle lighting and music from A Besere Velt: Yiddish Community Chorus of the Workmen's Circle and the Cambridge Community Chorus. Keynote speaker will be Herbert Kelman, a childhood refugee from Nazi Austria, Professor Emeritus of Social Ethics at Harvard University, co-author of *Crimes of Obedience: Toward a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility*, and a specialist on international conflict and its resolution. This free program is . For more information, contact the Cambridge Peace Commission at 617-349-4694 or choffman@cambridgema.gov.
- May 6** **NAMI Walks for the Mind of America** - Join people from around the state at Artisani Park in Brighton along the banks of the Charles River for the 3rd annual Massachusetts walk to raise awareness and money for programs of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI). Registration begins at 9 a.m. with the kickoff at 11 a.m. Entertainment will follow. To sign up, form a walking team, or make a donation, or get more information, check the website at <www.namimass.org> or contact Stephany Melton at 781-938-4048 voice, 781-938-4069 fax, or <namiwalksboston@nami.org>.

- May 5-6 **Planning a Life: Making the Most out of High School**, a two day conference on transition planning for students, ages 15-22, who are in special education and their parents. Find out what you need to know about, when you need to ask about it, and who you need to go to for answers. Registration is \$100, and space is limited to 40 participants. Sponsor is the Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN) and will be held at their office, 1135 Tremont Street, suite 420. For more information contact Terri McLaughlin at <tmclaugh@fcsn.org> or 617-236-7210. Register on the web at <www.fcsn.org>.
- May 5 **Assistive Technology, Disability, and Family** will feature Judi Rogers, a disabled mother, activist, equipment designer, author and parenting specialist at Through the Looking Glass in Oakland, CA <<http://lookingglass.org/index.php>>. This one-day conference sponsored by the Lemelson Assistive Technology Development Center and the School for Interdisciplinary Arts of Hampshire College in Amherst is for families who have a child, parent or grandparent with a disability, adaptive equipment designers, engineers, students, educators and community advocates. For more information contact the Lemelson Assistive Technology Development Center at 413-559-5613 or go their website at <<http://lemelson.hampshire.edu>>.
- May 6 **Mental Health Conditions in the Teenage Years: A Program for Parents**, 8-30 am - 3:30 pm, in O'Keeffe Auditorium at Mass General Hospital, 55 Fruit Street in Boston. Experts on adolescent mental health will provide information for understanding the behaviour and needs of teenagers who have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. Seating is limited and pre-registration is required. For more information call 617-724-8318 or go to <www.moodandanxiety.org>.
- May 9 **Boston Voice Users** is a group for people who use speech recognition or dictation software. They meet 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at MIT in Building 2, Rm. 142. Go to <www.bostonvoiceusers.com> to find out more about meetings and discussions.
- May 11 **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 – 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment
- May 16 **Disability Policy Consortium (DPC)** monthly meeting on 3rd Tuesday of month, 1-3 p.m. at the State House, Room A-1, in Boston
- May 17 **Transition: Planning the Next Steps for Youths 14-22** is a workshop in Mattapan for students and their parents about designing the right curriculum and supports throughout high school so that the student will be on the right track for becoming self-sufficient after graduation. Information and strategies to help translate individual preferences and dreams into meaningful goals in the IEP. The workshop, presented by the Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN), will be at the Mildred Avenue Community Center, 5 Mildred Avenue, from 6 - 8:30 p.m. Register by contacting FCSN at 617-236-7210 or 800-331-0688 or online at <register@fscn.org>.
- May 17 **Promoting Employment for People with Disabilities in Subsidized Housing** is a half-day workshop for staff in housing authorities and service providers presented by Tenant Assistance Program (TAP) of MassHousing. It will be held in the Community Building of Braintree Village, 2 McCusker Drive in Braintree from 8:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. Registration is free for TAP Members, \$25-35 for others. For more information, contact Janeen Harris at 617-854-1069 or visit <www.masshousing.com/TAPtraining>

- May 18 **On the Artside, Opening Reception**, 4-6:30 p.m. at the Webster House Gallery, 20 Webster Place in Brookline Village. Webster House is a psychiatric day rehabilitation program of vinfin. For more information, call 617-739-5461.
- May 24 **Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA (AACT)**, 1-3:30 p.m. at State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, Conference Room 1. Call 617-973-7507 voice or 617-973-7089 TTY for more information or to request interpreters. Due to security measures, please bring proper identification to gain entrance to all meetings
- May 29 **ASL interpreted events at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA)** - Join Deaf artist Carla DelPizzo for art tours of the museum or Lucy Annett and Wendy Jehlen for ASL interpreted art activities from 10 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. These events take place at the MFA Memorial Day Community Open House which is FREE for everyone. The MFA is at 465 Huntington Ave. in Boston and the accessible entrance is on the west side. For more information, contact Ruth Kahn at 617-369-3302 voice, 617-267-9703 TTY or <rkahn@mfa.org>.
- June 7 **Degas to Picasso: Modern Masters - art lecture in ASL with no spoken English**, 6:30 p.m. at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA). Deaf artist Carla DelPizzo will take you on a kaleidoscopic tour of European art from 1900 to the 1960s, including works of Degas, Gauguin, Rodin, Giacometti and Picasso. Pre-registration required by Wednesday, May 31. Call TTY (617) 267-9703 or e-mail access@mfa.org to register. The MFA is at 465 Huntington Ave. in Boston and the accessible entrance is on the west side.
- June 7 **RSI Monthly Drop-in Group** – first Wednesday of the month; see May 3rd listing for details.
- June 8 **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30– 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment
- June 9-10 **Exploring Accessibility, Inclusion, and Arts Education** is an International Conference by VSA arts in Washington, D.C. for professionals in the arts, education, and disability fields who are committed to growing inclusive communities and expanding opportunities for all people to learn through, participate in and enjoy the arts. Key note speakers include Elliot Eisner from Stanford University, author and theorist on arts education, and Temple Grandin, author and noted speaker on autism. Registration DEADLINE is May 3. For more information contact Stephanie Litvak at 800-933-8721, 202-628-2800 voice, 202-737-0645 TTY, or <conference@vsarts.org>.
- June 12 **Accessible America Award Presentation to the City of Cambridge** by representatives from National Organization on Disability (N.O.D.) and United Parcel Post (UPS) which is funding the \$25,000 prize. Festivities begin at 4:30 p.m. at Cambridge City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, 2 blocks from the Central Square stop on the MBTA Red Line. For more information contact the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities at 617-349-4692 voice, 617-492-0235 TTY or cthompson@cambridgema.gov.
- June 13 **Boston Voice Users** is a group for people who use speech recognition or dictation software. Meets 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. second Tuesday of the month (See May 9th listing for details.)
- June 14 **Kayaking for individuals with disabilities at Hopkinton State Park** will be sponsored by Outdoor Recreation of Hopkinton every Wednesday (June 14 to August 9) from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Adaptive paddle instructor and lifeguards will be available. Fee is \$5 per person but aides and family members are free. Contact Barry Gold at <info@OutRecHop.com> or 508-435-3965 on or after June 10 to make reservations for one day or the entire 9-week session, or go to <www.OutRecHop.com>.

- June 14-17 **Disability Goes Public: Re-imaging Policy / Protest / Possibilities**, Society for Disability Studies (SDS) 19th Annual Conference at the Hyatt Regency Bethesda near Washington, D.C. The SDS is a nonprofit scientific and educational organization committed to developing theoretical and practical knowledge about disability and to promoting the full and equal participation of people with disabilities in society. Members include social scientists, scholars in the humanities and disability rights advocates. Registration ranges from \$250 for members to \$350 for non-members, or \$95 for students and people on low-income. Mail registration closes May 1. For more information about SDS and the Conference, check their website at <www.uic.edu/orgs/sds/index.html>.
- June 20 **Disability Policy Consortium (DPC)** monthly meeting on 3rd Tuesday of month, 1-3 p.m. at the State House, Room A-1, in Boston.
- June 28-30 **Employment for All: Start a Revolution** is a conference on employment for persons with significant disabilities sponsored by the Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE). It will be held at Marriott Copley Place in Boston where Andy Imparato, president of American Association for Persons with Disabilities will give the opening remarks and actress, Geri Jewell will wrap it up. Supported Employment 101, a 2 ½ day course held during the conference, will cover the history and philosophy of community-based supported employment, person-centered assessment and planning, job development and marketing, job site training, and on-the-job support strategies. There will also be a forum designed just for employers. Registration ranges from \$155 for supported employees and family members to \$445 for late registration for professions. For more information go to <www.apse2006.org> or contact Berenise Reyes-Albino at 617-284-4314, <berenise.albino@umb.edu>.
- June 28 **Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA meets from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.** this month at State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, Conference Room #2. Call 617-973-7507 voice or 617-973-7089 TTY for more information, to request Interpreters, or confirm date and time of meeting. Due to security measures, please bring proper identification to gain entrance to all meetings.
- July 5 **RSI Monthly Drop-in Group** – first Wednesday of the month; see May 3rd listing for details.
- July 13 **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 to 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment.
- July 14 **destination anywhere - DEADLINE for entries in a National Juried Exhibit for Young Artists with Disabilities**, sponsored by VSA arts in collaboration with Volkswagen of America. Eligible participants are young artists ages 16-25 living in the United States who have a physical, cognitive or mental disability. The artwork may be representational or abstract, and the theme is to take the viewer to a destination they where they never expected to be. Winners will be announced on August 18, 2006. Grand prize is \$20,000, First prize \$10,000, Second prize \$6000, and twelve Awards of Excellence of \$2000 each. For more information go to <www.vsarts.org/Vwcall> or call Jennifer Colaguori at 202-628-2800, x3885.
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Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities

The Commission was established in 1979 to act as a clearinghouse on disability and access issues throughout the City of Cambridge. We strive to raise awareness of disability matters, to eliminate discrimination, and to promote equal opportunity for people with all types of disabilities – physical, mental and sensory. The Commission provides information, referral, guidance, and technical assistance to individuals and their families, employers, public agencies, businesses and private non-profit organizations.

The goal of our 11-member citizen advisory board, comprised primarily of individuals with disabilities, is to maximize access to all aspects of Cambridge community life. Our regularly scheduled Commission meetings, which always include an opportunity for public comment, are held at 5:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month.

Access Notice: The City of Cambridge and Commission for Persons with Disabilities do not discriminate on the basis of disability. This newsletter is available in e-mail, large print and other alternative formats upon request. To add your name to our mailing list, to inquire about alternative formats, or for information about other auxiliary aids and services or reasonable modifications in policies and procedures, contact CCPD.

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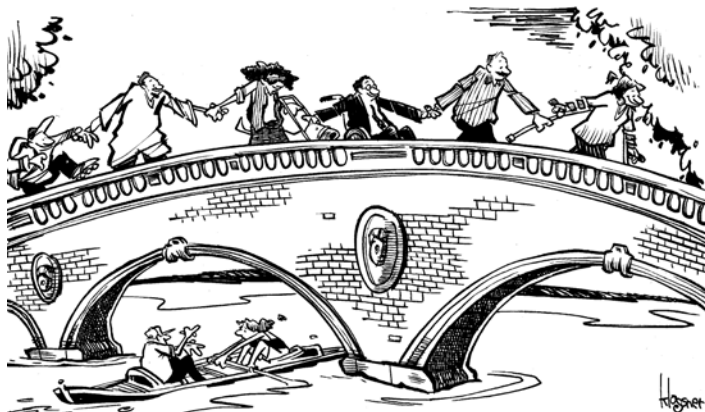
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AccessLetter is produced by the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities,
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51 Inman Street, second floor, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02139

We welcome your articles, comments, criticisms, and suggestions. Write us!

Read past issues on our website: www.cambridgema.gov/DHSP2/disabilities.cfm

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51 Inman Street, second floor
Cambridge, MA 02139